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SUBJECT: Making Themselves Heard: South China Christians in Government and the Media

(U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg for Reasons: 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a few exceptions to the general rule of silence, especially in instances where Christian government and media officials help facilitate access, Christians in south China have recently enjoyed opportunities to talk (openly or obliquely) about their faith, according to Guangdong seminary and church leaders. In one city, a local government employee training session reportedly incorporated "Christian moral principles" into its curriculum. Additionally, an underground church leader told us that a radio station in Guangzhou recently invited church members to participate in family values and parenting-related programs. END SUMMARY.

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Guangdong Seminarians Laud Religious Training  
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¶2. (C) Professors and preachers at Guangdong Union Theological Seminary (GUTS) recently described to Congenoff signs of growing openness to learning about Christian values among certain local governments. According to Office Director Rev. Lin En Ling, in 2006 the Shantou city government required that officials attend a full-day religious training seminar. This course, Lin said, focused on how Christian and Buddhist beliefs could benefit a "harmonious society" and encouraged government workers to learn more about religion. Seminary President Chen Yi Lu added that the Shantou and Chaozhou city regions of eastern Guangdong province had a historically large number of Christians, even in government, and that it was "no surprise" that local authorities there were more open to religious training. Chen noted that such seminars would never have been allowed in the past.

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Underground Churches Discreetly Take to the Airwaves  
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¶3. (C) Underground church leaders in Guangzhou have set up radio talk-show series and newspaper columns with "friendly" media organizations, according to Ruth Han (strictly protect), member of Lijiang Christian Fellowship. Han said she had partnered with Guangzhou Radio Station in early 2007 to host a series on family values and parenting techniques. Program materials were drawn from American Christian counseling books; and church members working at the radio station helped set up the talk-show program. The series was well received, according to Han, because Chinese parents had few other resources for family counseling and interest in children's psychological and moral development was increasing.

**¶4.** (C) Han explained that media organizations still did not allow explicit mention of Christianity-related words like God (shangdi) or Jesus (yesu), especially in print media. Instead, Christian radio hosts and columnists would weave specific biblical phrases into their reports - phrases that might not convey religious meaning to the general public but were clearly identifiable to practicing Christians. Han also said that the use of the word "Creator" (zaoren), a figure in many traditional Chinese stories, is accepted by censors. In addition, Han identified several 2007 columns in the Guangzhou Daily and Southern Metropolis Daily newspapers that included biblical references, and stated that several editors were Christians.

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Church Gossip: Which Leaders Are Christian?  
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**¶5.** (C) Speculation on which central and provincial government leaders are Christian is a favorite topic of discussion for seminary and church leaders of various stripes. GUTS seminarians suggested that at least one Shantou city vice-mayor and possibly several Shandong provincial-level department directors were Christian. Han noted that the latest rumor to sweep the underground church network was that Premier Wen Jia Bao's wife and at least one child were secretly Christian, but with no word on the Premier himself. Han acknowledged that there was no way to substantiate this speculation but commented that the rumors reflected the hope of many Christians that a sympathetic leader would be able to discreetly push for more religious freedom.

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